



Billing Code: 4120-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

[CMS-3379-PN]

Medicare and Medicaid Programs: Application by Accreditation Commission for Health Care for Continued CMS-Approval of its Hospice Accreditation Program

AGENCY: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, HHS.

ACTION: Proposed Notice.

SUMMARY: This proposed notice acknowledges the receipt of an application from the Accreditation Commission for Health Care for continued recognition as a national accrediting organization for hospices that wish to participate in the Medicare or Medicaid programs. The statute requires that within 60 days of receipt of an organizations complete application, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services publish a notice that identifies the national accrediting body making the request, describes the nature of the request, and provides at least a 30-day public comment period.

DATES: To be assured consideration, comments must be received at one of the addresses provided below, no later than 5 p.m. on July 30, 2019.

ADDRESSES: In commenting, please refer to file code CMS-3379-PN. Because of staff and resource limitations, we cannot accept comments by facsimile (FAX) transmission.

Comments, including mass comment submissions, must be submitted in one of the following three ways (please choose only one of the ways listed):

1. Electronically. You may submit electronic comments on specific issues in this

regulation to <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the “submit a comment” instructions.

2. By regular mail. You may mail written comments to the following address ONLY:

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services,

Department of Health and Human Services,

Attention: CMS-3379-PN,

P.O. Box 8010,

Baltimore, MD 21244-8010.

Please allow sufficient time for mailed comments to be received before the close of the comment period.

3. By express or overnight mail. You may send written comments to the following address ONLY:

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services,

Department of Health and Human Services,

Attention: CMS-3379-PN,

Mail Stop C4-26-05,

7500 Security Boulevard,

Baltimore, MD 21244-1850.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Lillian Williams, (410) 786-8636.

Joy Webb, (410) 786-1667.

Karen Tritz, (410) 786-0821.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION:

Inspection of Public Comments: All comments received before the close of the comment period

are available for viewing by the public, including any personally identifiable or confidential business information that is included in a comment. We post all comments received before the close of the comment period on the following Web site as soon as possible after they have been received: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the search instructions on that Web site to view public comments.

I. Background

Under the Medicare program, eligible beneficiaries may receive covered services in a hospice provided certain requirements are met by the hospice. Sections 1861(dd) of the Social Security Act (the Act) establish distinct criteria for facilities seeking designation as a hospice. Regulations concerning provider agreements are at 42 CFR part 489 and those pertaining to activities related to the survey and certification of facilities are at 42 CFR part 488. The regulations at 42 CFR part 418, specify the conditions that a hospice must meet in order to participate in the Medicare program, the scope of covered services and the conditions for Medicare payment for hospices.

Generally, to enter into an agreement, a hospice must first be certified by a State survey agency as complying with the conditions or requirements set forth in part 418. Thereafter, the hospice is subject to regular surveys by a State survey agency to determine whether it continues to meet these requirements.

However, there is an alternative to surveys by state agencies. Section 1865(a)(1) of the Act provides that, if a provider entity demonstrates through accreditation by an approved national accrediting organization that all applicable Medicare conditions are met or exceeded, we will deem those provider entities as having met the requirements. Accreditation by an accrediting organization is voluntary and is not required for Medicare participation.

If an accrediting organization is recognized by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services as having standards for accreditation that meet or exceed Medicare requirements, any provider entity accredited by the national accrediting body's approved program would be deemed to meet the Medicare conditions. A national accrediting organization applying for deeming authority under part 488, subpart A, must provide us with reasonable assurance that the accrediting organization requires the accredited provider entities to meet requirements that are at least as stringent as the Medicare conditions. Our regulations concerning the reapproval of accrediting organizations are set forth at §488.5. The regulations at §488.5(e)(2)(i) require accrediting organizations to reapply for continued deeming authority every 6 years or sooner as determined by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

The Accreditation Commission for Health Care's (ACHC's) term of approval for its hospice accreditation program expires November 27, 2019.

II. Approval of Deeming Organizations

Section 1865(a)(2) of the Act and our regulations at §488.5 require that our findings concerning review and approval of a national accrediting organization's requirements consider, among other factors, the applying accrediting organization's requirements for accreditation; survey procedures; resources for conducting required surveys; capacity to furnish information for use in enforcement activities; monitoring procedures for provider entities found not in compliance with the conditions or requirements; and ability to provide CMS with the necessary data for validation.

Section 1865(a)(3)(A) of the Act further requires that we publish, within 60 days of receipt of an organization's complete application, a notice identifying the national accrediting body making the request, describing the nature of the request, and providing at least a 30-day

public comment period. We have 210 days from the receipt of a complete application to publish notice of approval or denial of the application.

The purpose of this proposed notice is to inform the public of ACHC's request for continued CMS approval of its hospice accreditation program. This notice also solicits public comment on whether ACHC's requirements meet or exceed the Medicare conditions for participation for hospices.

III. Evaluation of Deeming Authority Request

ACHC submitted all the necessary materials to enable us to make a determination concerning its request for continued approval of its hospice accreditation program. This application was determined to be complete on May 1, 2019. Under Section 1865(a)(2) of the Act and our regulations at §488.5 (Application and re-application procedures for national organizations), our review and evaluation of ACHC will be conducted in accordance with, but not necessarily limited to, the following factors:

- The equivalency of ACHC's standards for hospices as compared with CMS' hospice conditions of participation.
- ACHC's survey process to determine the following:
 - ++ ACHC's composition of the survey team, surveyor qualifications, and the ability of the organization to provide continuing surveyor training.
 - ++ ACHC's processes compared to those of State agencies, including survey frequency, and the ability to investigate and respond appropriately to complaints against accredited facilities.
 - ++ ACHC's processes and procedures for monitoring a hospice found out of compliance with ACHC's program requirements. These monitoring procedures are used only when

ACHC identifies noncompliance. If noncompliance is identified through validation reviews, the State survey agency monitors corrections as specified at §488.9(c).

++ ACHC's capacity to report deficiencies to the surveyed facilities and respond to the facility's plan of correction in a timely manner.

++ ACHC's capacity to provide CMS with electronic data, and reports necessary for effective validation and assessment of the organization's survey process.

++ ACHC's staff adequacy and other resources, and its financial viability.

++ ACHC's capacity to adequately fund required surveys.

++ ACHC's policies with respect to whether surveys are announced or unannounced to assure that surveys are unannounced.

++ ACHC's agreement to provide CMS with a copy of the most current accreditation survey together with any other information related to the survey as we may require (including corrective action plans).

IV. Collection of Information Requirements

This document does not impose information collection requirements, that is reporting, recordkeeping and third-party disclosure requirements. Consequently, there is no need for review by the Office of Management and Budget under the authority of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35).

V. Response to Comments

Because of the large number of public comments we normally receive on Federal Register documents, we are not able to acknowledge or respond to them individually. We will consider all comments we receive by the date and time specified in the "DATES" section of this preamble, and, when we proceed with a subsequent document, we will respond to the comments

in the preamble to that document.

Upon completion of our evaluation, including evaluation of comments received as a result of this notice, we will publish a final notice in the Federal Register announcing the result of our evaluation.

CMS-3379-PN

Dated: June 11, 2019.

Seema Verma,

Administrator,

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

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